

Text: Luke 2:25-33

*At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the Law required, Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God:*

*"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel."*

*The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him.*

### **Simeon's delight**

At this time of the year, we seem to be in the dark all the time. It is dark when I get up in the morning, and gets dark well before dinner in the evening. It is especially dark on those rainy, windy days. I really appreciate the light on the few sunny days that we get.

God created light on the first day of creation and it is one of those gifts from God that we take so much for granted. We only realise just how important it is when we are left in the dark.

A woman was driving home on a dark and rainy night. It was very difficult for her to see the road ahead. Seeing the taillights of another car in front of her that seemed to be going in her direction, she decided to follow it. Following the taillights made travelling on that dark road so much easier.

All of sudden the car in front of her came to stop. She began wonder what had happened, perhaps the car in front had hit an animal or broken down. Much to her alarm the car in front of her turned off its lights. In total darkness she began to worry which soon turned to anger. Why was this person stopping in the middle of the road and then turning off their lights, allowing total darkness to engulf her?

A knock on her window startled her. She looked up and there stood a man beside her car. She cracked the window open and asked the man what the problem was. The man replied by stating that that was the exact question he was going to ask her. She retorted that she was not the one who had stopped in the middle on the road and then turned off the lights. The man's reply was that they were not in the middle of the road but in his driveway.

Light in the thickest darkness brings relief, shows the way to go, illuminates obstacles hidden in the darkness and enables us to walk or travel safely to our destination.

When the old man Simeon saw the baby Jesus cradled in his mother's arms, even though it was broad daylight, for him it was as if a light had suddenly been turned on. He saw with his very own eyes the Messiah that people for generations had been waiting to see. He could see, in this very small baby, something very special – he is a light that will reveal God to all people. He will drive away the darkness that surrounds the world because of sin and bring the light of forgiveness, hope and eternal life.

How did Simeon meet the Christ child? Mary and Joseph had bundled up their six-week-old baby boy and made the trip from Bethlehem to the temple at Jerusalem, where they planned to present their firstborn son to the Lord and make a sacrifice for Mary's purification, as the Law of Moses required.

On the other hand, it seems that going into the temple wasn't on Simeon's list of things to do for that day. However, the Holy Spirit had tapped Simeon on the shoulder and guided him there. It was something that Simeon could not ignore because it appears that he had been promised by the Spirit that he would not die until he got a good look at God's chosen one. With a promise like that Simeon could not afford to ignore the slightest sense that he should be here instead of somewhere else.

And so it happened that as Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus made their way into the temple, Simeon noticed them and especially took note of the little baby. "Excuse me, may I hold your baby?" he asked. I imagine Mary's heart started beating pretty fast, but she decided the old man looked harmless enough. Strangers had been visiting their child ever since he was born. Here was just another stranger who approached them and spoke ever so highly of the tiny baby and worshipped him as Lord and king.

As the old man took the child in his arms it was revealed to him, like a light in dark room. This is the child he and the entire world had been waiting for. Then he said the most amazing thing,

*"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel."*

This child in his arms would light up the whole world. John agreed with Simeon in his Gospel. He says, *"The Word (meaning Jesus - God's Son) was the source of life, and this life brought light to people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out. ... This was the real light—the light that comes into the world and shines on all people. (John 1:4,5,9).*

When he handed the baby back to Mary, Simeon knew that his long wait was over. Death would not be long now that the Spirit had kept his promise. Having seen and held the Light of the world, he could now depart from this world in peace, the same peace that the angels had promised to the shepherds when they sang, *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those with whom God is pleased."*

And after he had blessed Mary and Joseph, he went on to tell them more. A bright light casts deep shadows. As many people who rejoiced to learn who Jesus was, would grind their teeth against him. He would force people to choose whether they really wanted to get close to God or not. He would expose those who did not. This child will bring light into the darkness of the world but there will be those who will do their best to get rid of him. He warned Mary that all this would bring her pain in the future.

Old Simeon had lived long enough to know that if God wants to bless us, to save us, somehow God must confront the worst about us, the things we do to one another, the terrible things we do to ourselves. That confrontation would not come cheaply. Salvation would be a very costly thing. This cuddly baby Jesus in Mary's arms would grow up, would speak the truth to us, and would die for us. A cross stands behind the manger. There is close connection between Christmas and Good Friday.

Jesus had come to bring the light of God's love and grace into people's lives.

Darkness in people's lives can differ from one person to the next. The darkness may be the lack of basic food, water or health care.

To a child in a war torn country, the darkness is the killing, raping and plundering that happens in a civil war.

For another person, darkness is struggling with an illness, losing the struggle with failing abilities and entering a nursing home.

For some, darkness is an addiction, an unhappy relationship, an inconsiderate boss.

For others, darkness is looking to the day when a loved one will die.

The deepest darkness is inside each of us. It is the darkness of sin that affects every moment of every day, infecting every word and action. In fact, sometimes the darkness becomes so much a part of our way of living that we have difficulty recognising that the darkness is something evil.

Simeon recognised in the baby Jesus, a light that would bring salvation to all those trapped in darkness. This light will change things.

Where there is guilt he brings forgiveness.

Where there is despair he gives hope.

Where there is weakness he offers strength.

Where there is anxiety and worry he provides peace.

Where there is sickness and grief he gives faith in God.

Where there is failure he gives his love.

Wherever there is darkness in your life, in your family, in our world, Christ is ready to bring light and life to chase away the darkness that enshrouds our lives. When you look at the child in the arms of Simeon see what he saw, the one who will meet you at your point of darkness, whatever that darkness is for you. His love never changes. In his light, you will find the strength to carry on. In his light, the darkness will be replaced with hope, love, and forgiveness.

But there is more. When the old man Simeon was holding the newborn child, the words he spoke were remarkable for their vast and universal scope. He said that this child has come for *all* people – for all nations and races of the world. His faith didn't stop at saying "Jesus is my personal Saviour". No, his was a more powerful faith that announced, "Jesus is the Saviour of *the world*".

This cuts right across any personal ownership of the Saviour Jesus. No individual has more rights to him than any other. No one owns him - not you, not me, not the Protestants or the Catholics or the Pentecostals, and certainly not the Church. The babe is not ours - we are his! This child is God's Son who gave his life to rescue us from sin and death. He did it so that we might belong to him.

Simeon is leading the way in celebrating this precious baby boy. God has come to earth – this child is a light revealing God's love and bringing salvation for all people. Let's take this Christmas joy with us into the new year as we join with Simeon in his song,

*"With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel."*